

The book covers an impressive range of material that effectively documents the tenacious occlusion of female subjectivity in Western literature. Unfortunately, by ignoring the valuable work of feminist medievalists who have already drawn on much of the same poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory in pursuit of similar questions pertaining to the female voice and the vexed status of female authorship, Callahan's first two chapters have essentially reinvented the wheel. The subsequent chapters, although repetitive, are worth looking at for a sense of connections to other literary periods, and the last chapter offers territory to be mined for teaching. Undergraduates are often unwilling to admit that the misogyny of medieval culture can persist into the present age: the examples from television and film that Callahan discusses help to demonstrate otherwise.

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Caviness, Madeline. *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages. Sight, Spectacle and Scopic Economy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. Pp. 232.

Caviness's opening – "Prelude: The Problem with Mary: disembodied motherhood" – sets out the essential problem she addresses in *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages*: the eroticized body. Medieval clerics' response to potential erotic connotations of the Blessed Virgin was to disembody her, controlling her by translating her into metaphors, but this strategy would not do for "regular" women. The feminist aim of the 1960s, to make women visible, was a double-edged sword because women have always been viewed, but as objects, not subjects, nor have women been allowed to be viewers. Caviness juxtaposes medieval and modern visualizations of women to establish the continuity of the objectifying gaze from medieval to modern times.

Caviness intends to show "that not only have images been used to construct the female body as an object of view, by manipulating its viewing community, but they have also at times been subverted, chiefly by women artists, to block that kind of objectification." "Visualizing" women has the multiple meanings of being portrayed, theorized, and made manifest. Freud, Lacan, and Mulvey are the major theorists who inform Caviness's critical readings in three case studies that represent the different categories of visualization – "Sight, Spectacle and Scopic Economy" – of the book's subtitle: "Sight," woman's transgressive looking; "Spectacle," the woman being looked at; and "Scopic Economy," the female reappropriation of the enterprise.

The term "scopic economy" refers to the powers and pleasures of seeing another person as an erotic object. Caviness acknowledges the Freudian concepts of penis envy and fear of castration, but then turns to Linda Mulvey's modern gaze theory, expressed in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, to counter them. Viewing women, as the theory goes, generates fear leaving the male two choices: to overvalue or undervalue women. Caviness takes the general ideas of this theory while nuancing it by introducing the problem of essentialism: is the aggressive gaze always masculine? Is the female gaze always punished?

Chapter 1, “Good Girls Don’t Look: Lot’s Wife and Daughters” provides the most straightforward application of scopophilic theory. The Biblical story presents three clear aspects of gazing. First, Lot’s wife is both viewed and viewer. Her transformation into a pillar of salt – thin, narrow, rigid, nude, – is punishment for her (mis)appropriation of the male privilege of looking. She is a powerful warning to women who look. Second, Ham sees his father naked, infringing the unstated taboo that men, above all fathers, are not to be objectified by curious and controlling gazing, and is cursed. Lot’s daughters’ seeing merits a more complex and nuanced discussion. Lot’s daughters, who don’t look (as far as we know) are being looked at in manuscript illustrations. According to Biblical commentators, Lot’s daughters incurred greater guilt for deceiving him than he did for incest. Thus the daughters are represented as lascivious agents or sexual commodities. This analysis intertwines critical discussion of the text, the visual witness from manuscript illustrations, and other artistic witnesses. Caviness points out the inadequacy of Freud and Lacan who, making theory in their male image, focus on mother-son taboos and overlook the silenced female’s threat to patriarchal power. The father’s transgression can be forgiven; that of the daughter(s) must be punished.

The virgin martyrs in “Sado-Erotic Spectacles, Breast Envy, and the Bodies of Martyrs” are spectacles of repetitious and brutal tortures including mastectomy. The audience for the torturing is both female and male. Gazing at the punished female is rewarded with pleasure, either sadistic (pleasure taken in another’s pain) or masochistic (the subject’s pleasure in his or her own suffering.) Here Caviness expands on Mulvey, who proposed only the male voyeur, suggesting that the woman spectator complemented the male spectator’s sadism with the female’s masochism as voyeur of her own destruction. Medieval depictions of the tortured virgin martyrs can be erotic, sadistic, or abject. Caviness contrasts the focus on the breasts of the virgin martyrs in manuscript and stained glass images with the absence of equivalent torture of male saints. One of her most amazing and intriguing discussions uses startling visual images of a St. Barbara Altarpiece which dramatically juxtaposes the mutilation scenes of Christ and St. Barbara to powerfully evoke the connection between breast and penis anxiety. Caviness sees this same fear of female sexuality in today’s snuff movies and video games.

Chapter 3, “The Broken Mirror: Parts, Relics, Freaks” takes a third approach to visualizing. Lacanian theory proposes that we see our bodies as parts before we see them whole. This makes fragmentation more infantile, less sophisticated, than unity, but Caviness intends to demonstrate “how self-representation in fragments may be a sophisticated tactic to reclaim and de-eroticize the body.” This chapter then is a female answer to the problems proposed in the two previous case studies – how to counter both the punishment for viewing and the indignities of being viewed erotically. In the Middle Ages, the divided body could become a powerful relic; this “relicizing” then becomes a potential strategy for modern artists. Caviness juxtaposes medieval and modern images of body fragmentation to demonstrate their similar cultural functionalities.

Hildegard of Bingen acutely observed the ways in which men look at women and responded in her own texts. Hildegard refused to depict Eve at the Fall in the normal way—nude and seductive—showing her instead as a cloud of stars (which appropriates the biblical metaphor of Abraham as progenitor 22: 17). Caviness discusses resonances of Hildegard's work with those of twentieth-century women artists. This case study concludes with a reading of the eleventh vision of *Scivias*, Book III, arguing that it demonstrates how bodily fragmentation can be a technique for survival. Caviness artfully uses examples of contemporary artists who also try to de-fetishize the body using fragmentation as a defense, although she carefully notes ways in which these arguments are problematic.

Caviness refers to the work of the modern artist Kiki Smith, which is also featured on the cover, to lead to a discussion of "What is obscenity?" As Kristeva emphasized, the object is repulsive, for fundamental biological reasons that protect the individual. But when repulsive bodily things are framed as "art" the gap between anticipated aesthetic pleasure and its absence is the essence of obscenity. Thus, both medieval and modern women attempt to remove their own bodies from circulation as sexual objects by creating some kind of counterimage to the erotic. This is not completely a woman's issue, for as this study shows, both the patriarchy of the medieval church and modern artists such as Picasso colluded with a feminist agenda—and thus a problematic ending: "in this scopic economy, our readings do not have to be bound by the gender of the artist or by a gendered gaze."

Caviness's analysis of her material proceeds at both an introductory and advanced level. It is introductory when she discusses the overall theme of the study, looks at theory, discusses specific texts, and examines artistic representations. But as the work progresses, the heavily nuanced readings resonate with more sophisticated readers. In all, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages* is a compact book with a multiplicity of purposes.

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Dessaint, Micheline. *La Femme médiatrice dans de grandes oeuvres romanesques du XIIe siècle*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001. Pp. 203.

La Femme médiatrice is part of a doctoral dissertation, directed by Emmanuèle Baumgartner, for the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris III) in 1998. The title of the dissertation, "Figures et fonctions du médiateur dans quelques romans en vers du douzième siècle," indicates this study of women intermediaries was originally a subsection of a larger study focusing on masculine characters in the romances. This relationship of women as subsidiary to a more important group, men, underlies *La Femme médiatrice*. Despite the promise of the title and despite a number of perceptive readings of individual narratives, American feminist scholars will find the book frustrating and ultimately disappointing.